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ABSTRACT

The role and status of English instruction in Korea is outlined. The role of English in Korea as a whole, English instruction within the educational system, language teacher training, textbook use, educational administration, educational development and planning, English instruction outside of the educational system, British and American support for English instruction, prospects for the sale of English instructional materials in Korea, interest in English language creative writing and publications, and current research are reported. Although English is the principal foreign language in Korea, the level of English communicative competence among Korean students is low. (RW)

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**THE BRITISH COUNCIL
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DIVISION**

The British Council

ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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1. Role and status of English

English is strictly a foreign language in Korea, though a medium of intensive use in the country's international relations. Korea's close economic and military ties with the United States have emphasised this effect.

English has been taught formally in Korea for over 90 years, but until the end of the Second World War the spoken language was only taught efficiently in missionary schools with expatriate teachers. During the Japanese occupation of the country, 1910-1945, English as a subject was gradually ousted by imperial policy and replaced by Japanese as the first foreign language. At the present time, however, the primacy of English over all other foreign languages has been fully restored.

Despite this fact English is not used as the medium of instruction in either primary, secondary or tertiary educational establishments.

Nowadays, in the senior circles of public and academic life, discourse in English is generally quite easy. This applies especially in the fields of science and medicine. Many higher academic institutions issue their handbooks, newsletters and brochures in English and a substantial number of government publications appear in English. A considerable number of books in English are acquired by the libraries of higher academic institutions (many of the library staff have been trained in the USA), especially in the fields of science and technology. Two national newspapers and a journal are published in English and there are broadcasts round the clock on the locally based American Forces Korea Network. The main bookshops are well-stocked with books in English, some of them being locally produced editions.

Since Korea has been appointed as host to the Olympic games in 1988, a number of organisations connected with public services have initiated their own English teaching programmes. Most of these organisations are aware of the very mediocre standard of spoken English which their employees display, and are making an effort to improve their conversational ability by providing language tuition and installing language laboratories.

Most Korean speakers of fluent English have been taught an American style of pronunciation, but there is, curiously, a tendency to hanker after British modes of speech and writing.

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2. English within the education system

After the President's recent visit to the ASEAN countries it was publicly announced that the government will allow primary schools, both public and private to teach English, and the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) has been instructed to prepare a syllabus for the Primary School English Textbooks. At present only a few primary schools have started teaching English, but the number is likely to increase over the next few years.

The teaching of English in most cases commences in the middle school at the age of 12-13, continues for three years there and afterwards for a further three years in high school (in both the general high schools and the vocational high schools). In some schools an additional foreign language may be taken, usually French, but English remains compulsory. The number of English lessons per week is 3-5. At university level, English is compulsory for all students in the first two years of the four-year course: a pass in English is necessary in order to graduate, yet those not following an 'English Major' course receive only two or three lessons a week. University courses work on a credit system, and the number of credits allotted to foreign languages (including English) is low.

At school level, no distinction is made between English language and literature and inordinate attention is paid to translation and grammar. Active skills are difficult to cultivate owing to the very large classes of up to 70 pupils, and teachers are severely restricted by the textbooks, poor aural/oral ability, cramped conditions, and an approach which encourages repetition and memorisation rather than communicative competence.

After three years of study in the Middle School pupils take a common public examination, on the basis of which they are selected for high school. In the five largest cities of the country, placement of the successful candidates in the schools is done by computer. There is an English language element in the Middle School leaving test, which is completely objective and concentrates on grammatical structure and reading comprehension. It is compulsory to pass the English test in order to pass the examinations. There is a similar written examination after three years in the high school and the English component of this also is mainly objective, though there have been numerous proposals over the past few years to include an oral element.

At secondary level, the English syllabus is standardised by the government. The textbooks are government-approved and likewise standardised, there being one textbook per year. A special bureau at the Ministry of Education is responsible, in consultation with the inspectorate, for overseeing the curriculum and textbooks. The Teacher Education and International Education Bureau at the Ministry, in conjunction with the inspectorate, also organises in-service re-training programmes for teachers, and has currently undertaken to organise retraining for approximately twelve hundred foreign language teachers annually over the next few years. Curriculum research is being increasingly taken over by the Korean Educational Development Institute, an autonomous education institute founded to further educational research and distance education. The universities have complete freedom to choose their own textbooks, which are frequently published by the individual universities. These textbooks are either compiled by the professors of the English faculty or commissioned from outside publishers.

3. Teachers of English

The government has recently made it compulsory for all teachers to undergo a four-year full-time training course at either a college of education or a university department of education.

There is relatively little adult education undertaken in Korea though the equivalent to the Open University has recently been initiated.

Most teachers of English at the secondary level are divided into three grades, on the following basis. Grade 3 teachers have up to two years experience and up to 240 hours of in-service training. On completing this they are upgraded to grade 2. After a further year's in-service training they are upgraded to grade 1. The Boards of Education run the in-service courses under the guidance of the Ministry.

There is an extremely small minority of expatriate teachers in the state system at secondary level though this number is much greater at university level. The current in-service teacher-training programme is being conducted by a number of universities and private institutions including the British Council, all of which are offering courses for approximately 240 hours over varying periods of time. There is certainly a great deal of work to be done in this area as most of the secondary school teachers have a poor command of spoken English, despite having received English tuition for approximately six years at secondary school level and four years at tertiary level. The government policy on in-service teacher training is to offer a number of courses to teachers within Korea rather than sending them overseas to study, which is far less economical.

4. Materials Support

As mentioned previously, textbooks at junior high school level are uniform in their content and format though there is more flexibility in the senior high school textbooks.

At junior high school level there are two textbooks a year for the three year course; each lesson takes the form of a piece of prose, between 150 and 400 words followed by comprehension, vocabulary, grammatical, and transformational exercises. All these books are accompanied by cassette recordings of the prose passages in American English, though how much use is made of these by teachers is not known. Some schools make their own supplementary visual aids usually in the form of charts or flash cards. However, experience shows that many teachers do not use these materials presumably because in the majority of schools they simply do not exist.

At senior high school level there are approximately five government-approved textbooks from which individual schools may select their English course. All these books must adhere to certain guidelines set by the government, but they are all free to decide on the subjects selected for study. Again the form of each chapter is a prose passage followed by transformation, vocabulary, derivation and translation exercises.

Both junior and senior high school textbooks and their accompanying cassettes are easily available from local bookshops, though there are virtually no graded supplementary readers available in Korea.

5. Educational Administration in relation to English teaching

The structure and organisation of educational administration may be examined at three levels: national, provincial and district. Education at all levels is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, assisted by provincial and district Boards of Education in matters relating to primary and secondary education.

The Ministry of Education is the central government organ responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies relating to education and its administration. The Minister is appointed by the President and is assisted by a vice Minister, both of whom are advised by the Educational Policy Deliberation Committee.

Within the Ministry there are two offices - Planning and Management, and Supervision, each directed by assistant ministers - and eight bureaux: Elementary and Secondary Education, Higher Education, Teacher Certification and International Education, Curriculum and Textbooks, Junior College and Industrial Education, Non-formal and International Education, Physical and Health Education and Educational Facilities.

The subsidiary organisations attached to the Ministry are the National Institute of Education, the National Central Library, the History Compilation Committee, the National Academy of Science and the National Academy of Arts, all of which provide it with assistance and advice on policy formulation.

In 1963 Boards of Education were established in the nine provinces and two major cities, Seoul and Pusan, to administer primary and secondary education. Each has a legislative body chaired by the mayor or governor, and composed of seven members, appointed for a term of four years. This board is headed by a Superintendent who is appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Minister of Education.

In general each Board consists of two bureaux - one responsible for 'teaching-learning', and the other for 'administration'. The responsibilities entrusted to it by the Ministry are as follows:

- i. formulation of requisitions concerning the promotion of elementary and secondary education.
- ii. establishing and closing schools.
- iii. promoting extra-curricular activities.
- iv. budget and finance of elementary and secondary education.

For the purpose of effective administration each Board of Education is supported by district offices of education headed by Directors appointed from among school principals.

6. Development and planning of the teaching of English

The earliest formal education dates back to the 'Three Kingdoms period' when in 372 AD a state-operated institute known as a 'Taehak' was established to create a youth-training system to inculcate such virtues as patriotism, filial piety, trust, and cultural accomplishments.

Although the succeeding Koryo Dynasty (918-1392 AD) adopted Buddhism as its state religion, Confucianism exerted a notable influence on the form of education by institutionalising civil examinations. Thus the role of education was directed towards preparing young students for public service. The major state institute 'Kukchagam' was founded in 992 AD in the capital while there were many 'Hyanggyo' or village schools at the local level.

The succeeding Yi Dynasty (1392-1910 AD) adopted Confucianism in lieu of Buddhism as the state religion. This resulted in a thorough revision of the educational system, and a number of private schools or 'Sodang' being established by various groups of private citizens.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the massive influx of western cultures, mainly in the form of Roman Catholic and Protestant Missionaries, led to a pragmatic approach which laid the foundations of modern education. In the brief period between the opening of Korea to interaction with the West and annexation by Japan in 1910 a feeling of nationalism emerged among the people as a way in which they could work together for the modernisation of their country.

The process of modernisation was interrupted by thirty-six years of Japanese colonial rule, when the number of private schools increased substantially but education was limited to only a small fraction of the people.

Liberation in 1945 was a turning point for Korean education, after which the prime concern of educators became the provision of universal education for the masses. In the thirty-five years following liberation the number of schools increased, from approximately 3,000 to 10,000, while the number of students rose from 1,500,000 to 10 million.

In the midst of this educational resurgence a new Charter of National Education was promulgated in 1968. The Charter was developed in recognition of the need for a philosophical basis for education, to lay emphasis on Korea's national identity and of the need for a balance between tradition and progress, and between the needs of the individual and the nation. Thus it influenced the content of language teaching and other textbooks, without affecting language teaching methods.

After the efforts during the 1970s to lay a solid foundation for the forthcoming development into an industrialised society, a number of educational reforms were effected by the adoption of a new constitution in 1980. A commitment to lifelong education was undertaken, an attack was launched on private tuition, and the college entrance examination was reformed.

These reforms, in conjunction with the Charter of National Education, exemplify a redefinition of the philosophical ideas and goals of education. The Charter declares that education must develop creativity and a pioneering spirit in each individual, which should be combined to enhance the importance of individual services to the cause of national development.

7. English outside the education system

There are 44 'air and correspondence' high schools which provide high school-equivalent education for pupils unable to gain places in regular high schools. These programmes are broadcast on the radio services of both the official and commercial networks; the materials being compiled by the KEDI.

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, in Seoul, runs a foreign language teaching institute in collaboration with the Korea Trade Association and the Prime Minister's office, for the instruction of trade officials and government employees.

In the largest cities there are a number of language schools offering day and evening classes in English. In Seoul, for example, there is the Language Arts Testing and Training Institute (which the government uses as a testing station in English for candidates selected for overseas training), the Seventh Day Adventist English Institute and the Language Teaching Research Centre. None of these institutes could be considered to be dominant in the field.

By arrangement between the BBC and the Korean Broadcasting Service a number of British television English courses for adult learners have been broadcast, though unfortunately the broadcasts go out very early in the morning.

To date 'On We Go', 'Songs Alive' and 'People You Meet' have been television and it is hoped that 'Follow Me' will also be broadcast by KBS in 1982.

8. British Support for the Teaching of English

The Council has one full-time English Language Qualified Assistant Representative who is devoting much of his time to matters related to ELT. His duties include:

- i. giving advice and help, where requested, to all institutions from universities downward. Close contact is kept with the Ministry of Education, KEDI and professional associations for English teachers.
- ii. organising the initiation of a resource centre for British Council English teachers, and ensuring that modern British course books, listening materials and reference books are made available to library users.
- iii. acting as Chairman of the English Teachers' Discussion Club which has 50 members who attend regular twice-monthly meetings in the British Council.
- iv. taking responsibility for the English Language Testing done by the Council for applicants for courses in the UK.
- v. supervising and arranging workshops and seminars related to both English language and literature.

At present there are no British Council employed English teaching staff outside the Council centre, though a Council-recruited English teacher, Mr R Baker, recently arrived on a two year guaranteed contract with Korea University, a private university of good repute.

Teaching has recently started in the British Council centre in the form of a 240 hour teacher training course for 40 in-service middle school teachers of English. A forty hour Business English course was also initiated in May 1982.

British ELT materials are not widely known as American texts are usually preferred. There are however a number of locally produced copies of the better known texts like 'Kernel Intermediate' and 'Kernel Lessons Plus'.

9. American Support for the Teaching of English

Since 1982 is designated as the centennial of Korea-American Cultural relations much has appeared in the press recently on this topic.

There is strong American support for the teaching of English and, though it is not always obvious, it is pervasive.

Support is given in three main areas:

1. Teaching materials

Many of the textbooks used at university level are produced by American publishers. This is hardly surprising as the American lifestyle imposed on Korea since the Korean War has had a lasting and deep-rooted effect on the style of spoken English. This is constantly reinforced by American films on Korean television channels and, indeed, by access to the American Forces Television and Radio Stations.

As mentioned previously, the cassettes of secondary school reading passages are recorded in American English.

11. Teacher Training

Because so many of the senior teachers and academics were educated in the USA, and because of the large number of American teachers in Korea, American English is usually the form passed on to in-service teachers.

Sogang University, an American Jesuit foundation, recently opened a centre for the intensive re-training of middle school teachers, and conducted an intensive English course for 300 teachers of English in January 1982.

Moreover, parallel to the American-Korean Cultural Agreement, a memorandum was signed to promote bilateral educational exchanges. The following were agreed upon: book exchange programmes, two symposia on ELT to be held, one in Washington and one in Seoul, in 1983 and 1984 respectively; and a six week seminar in the USA for forty Korean English teachers.

11.1. Private Language Schools

There is a large number of private language schools in Korea, many of which employ American teachers of English who may or may not be qualified in EFL.

The Boston School of Modern Languages has also recently opened an English conversation school in Seoul and brought with it eight American trained staff for both administrative and teaching duties. This is, as far as is known, the only private school to have embarked on such a programme.

10. Other Agency Support

At present there are no ODA aid projects in Korea, though the Colombo Plan Training scheme still operates; it sent between twenty and thirty trainees to Britain in the current financial year. UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO and ILO are all represented in Korea and the British Council frequently acts in an advisory capacity to these organisations. There is, however, little interchange in the field of language training, although they all operate in English and occasionally send trainees to the UK. If financial support were available for the language training of local administrative staff and staff going for training overseas, there could be closer cooperation with all these agencies.

11. Commercial Opportunities

The prospects for the sale of English teaching materials and equipment in Korea are good, as there is an ever-increasing demand for more and better English teaching. The notional/functional approach however is relatively unknown and the majority of teachers and students feel more at home with structural material. Consequently much has to be done to publicise the more recent British trends in language teaching before any commercial potential can be exploited. Most of the secondary teachers have heard the term 'communicative competence' for a number of years, but have no idea what the implications of a communicative syllabus are.

BBC English programmes are popular despite their very early morning screening, but are not used in private language schools because of the rather expensive video element. Seoul High School, a state school undertaking a pilot programme for the Ministry of Education, is using 'On We Go' as a standard course though they do not have video facilities. This may be one area which could be exploited more fully in the future.

Many students of secondary school and college level are now visiting the UK and USA for English language programmes during their summer vacation. Figures suggest that in 1981 over 1,500 college students went to the USA while approximately 300 went to west European countries, the reason for the discrepancy being distance and relative cost. The potential for commercial

exploitation in this area has been increasing since the government relaxed the legislation which previously made it difficult for Korean nationals to travel abroad except on business.

A number of British language schools have established agencies in Seoul and are working in conjunction with airline operators to try to reduce the cost of studying in Britain.

12. Creative Writing

There is keen interest in both American and British novelists in Korea. This has led to the inception of a 'James Joyce Society' and a 'D H Lawrence Society' both of which hold occasional meetings and exhibitions. The members are mainly professors from university faculties of English.

A vast number of literary societies exist though the Korean Novelists Association, the Korean Writers' Association and the Korean Pen Club, are considered to be the most active and influential in current literary creative thought.

The two main English medium newspapers, the 'Korea Times' and 'Korea Herald' hold annual literary competitions and invite writers to submit both original pieces of English and translated works from Korean. Individual universities hold similar competitions on a more sporadic basis.

There is a great deal of local publishing activity in Korea. At present however Pergamon Press is the only British publishing company with an agent in Korea; other British publishers sell mainly through book importers. Much is copied without an agreement and this may account for British publishers' general reluctance to become too actively involved in Korea until it becomes a member of the International Copyright convention.

13. Current Research

Little organised government research is being conducted into the teaching of English language and literature, since the first priority is to satisfy the training needs of in-service teachers.

There are, however, a number of societies which attempt to promulgate recent theories and hold discussions related to English language and literature. The English Language and Literature Association of Korea has a very wide membership and holds an annual conference for all its members, usually inviting a number of foreign academics to participate. There is also a 'College English Teachers' Association' which holds regular meetings to discuss problems concerned with the teaching of English; and the Association of English Teachers in Korea which holds monthly meetings usually attended by American teachers of English. None of these associations can be said to be involved in particularly important or distinctive work, but all are important in that they provide the opportunity for discussion and interchange of ideas.

In the academic year 1981-82 Korea had one Hornby Scholar attending the London Institute of Education, Professor and Mrs Preston as British Council Specialist Tourists (literature) from Sussex University, six academics receiving grants-in-aid for the British University Summer Schools, one ELT bursar, and two academics attending ELT Summer Schools. Increased activity is expected in 1982-83.

14. Bibliography and Sources of Further Information

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15. General Statement

Despite the widely held belief that 'communicative competence' is the goal of foreign language learners, and despite the Ministry of Education's attempts to implement a teaching policy which will facilitate the accomplishment of that goal, the communicative ability of secondary school and university students is still extremely low. Teachers are hindered by inadequate pre-service training, lack of aural/oral ability, large classes, lack of facilities, out-dated textbooks and a rigid examination system. The Ministry of Education realises some of the inadequacies of the system and is attempting to rectify them; this takes time and a great deal of money.

At university level insufficient credits are given for proficiency in English and there is little attempt to coordinate such sporadic efforts as are made to teach English for Specific Purposes. Consequently, there is scope for courses for special groups of government and private employees, especially over the next few years prior to the Olympic Games in 1988. With the growing construction and ship building trade in the Middle East and the increasing number of British companies visiting Korea, the demand for English language training far exceeds the supply. The British Council in Korea is attempting to supply some of these demands but there is a great deal more to be done.